AFAG402
Aerial tree rescue

Introduction

This leaflet covers the safe working practices to be used by those involved in aerial tree rescue. It should be read in conjunction with HSE leaflets AFAG401 *Tree-climbing operations*, AFAG403 *Mobile elevating work platforms (MEWPs) for tree work* and the Treework webpages: www.hse.gov.uk/treework/index.htm. Also, see the Arboricultural Association's A guide to good climbing practice. For all details, see 'Further reading'.

Everyone involved in aerial tree rescue must have appropriate training in all the tasks required (see site management on the Treework webpages).

A rescuer's safety takes priority at all times. HSE's Arboriculture and Forestry Advisory Group (AFAG) recommends that climbing teams regularly practise rescue techniques.

General

A minimum of two people should be present during all tree-climbing operations. One of the ground team must be available, competent and equipped to perform an aerial rescue without delay.

Ensure a designated and responsible person knows the daily work programme and agree with them a suitable contact procedure. Where reasonably practicable, use a two-way radio or mobile phone and a pre-arranged call-in system. This is particularly important for remote sites where a check on the operator's safety is important.

Before the rescue

The worksite

As part of the risk assessment, the worksite and planned operation must be evaluated to establish the necessary emergency procedures for recovery and evacuation of casualties. All operators on site should have received adequate instruction and information and be trained in these procedures.

When an injured climber needs rescuing, ensure all possible precautions are taken to safeguard other members of the work team and any other people entering or approaching the worksite. If overhead cables are involved, do not approach the work area. Stop work, assess the situation and contact the relevant electricity company.

Ensure no unauthorised people are within the work area.

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The casualty

The casualty's condition must be assessed. If necessary, call for the emergency services before starting the rescue, making sure you give appropriate information about the location of the site and any particular access problems. You will need to provide personal details about the casualty (names and any relevant medical history etc), as well as the approximate time of the accident, treatment given and any chemicals involved.

Rescue equipment

The following rescue equipment needs to be available at the worksite:

- A suitable first-aid kit (see INDG214 *First aid at work: Your questions answered)*.
- A suitable climber's harness and associated equipment, eg ropes, strops, karabiners or any other equipment that the rescuer is familiar with to help their rescue technique.
- Other items of equipment necessary for a rescuer to climb effectively, eg a ladder, climbing irons, ascenders or descenders.
- A sharp knife with a retractable blade for cutting ropes etc. There is a risk of recoil when cutting ropes under tension, or cutting the wrong rope, as well as cut injuries to the rescuer or casualty. Consider other techniques for removing a casualty from a tensioned line.

Send for any additional rescue equipment that becomes necessary but is not available at the rescue site. If appropriate, other people in the vicinity may be directed to provide help.

The rescue

Helping the casualty

Reassure the casualty and encourage self-help whenever possible.

Select a rescue method that does not put the rescuer at risk and minimises the risk of further injury to the casualty.

Only trained operators should use equipment such as mobile elevated work platforms and cranes for an aerial tree rescue (see AFAG403).

Climbing to the casualty

Select an efficient method of climbing the tree to reach the casualty as quickly as possible.

If specialised climbing aids are available and rescue personnel are trained in their use, use them to speed up access to the casualty.

Take account of hazards such as severed, broken or hanging branches, or the casualty's equipment, that may create a risk.

Assess the tree(s) and select appropriate equipment to remove parts of the tree(s) that would impede the rescue operation. Other operators may do this if needed.

Use other personnel, if available, to prepare the equipment ready for use in the tree(s).

Make the area safe from immediate hazards as soon as possible.

Assess the casualty's condition and prioritise first-aid treatment.

In some cases, especially those involving fracture, crush or possible spinal injury, only move the casualty under medical supervision (eg a paramedic or the ambulance service).

Descending with the casualty

The rescuer needs to maintain close contact with the casualty to monitor changes in condition and to calm and control them if necessary.

Rescuers should be properly anchored at all times to ensure their own safety throughout the rescue operation. Anchor points must be selected to ensure they are capable of taking the anticipated loads during the rescue.

The rescuer and casualty need to descend together to ease movement through the branches and to monitor the casualty's condition.

Densely branched trees may require alternative methods of rescue. Obstacles on the ground may dictate the most suitable method.

Completing the rescue

Continue to help the casualty under the direction of paramedics until the casualty is transported from the site.

Ensure the site is safe and secure before all personnel leave. Note the contact details of any witnesses. Where possible, take photographs of the site. Do not use any of the equipment involved in the incident until it has been thoroughly examined by a competent person.

Notify management of the incident and record the occurrence in the accident book.

Report the incident to HSE in accordance with the requirements of the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR).

Further reading

Tree-climbing operations Leaflet AFAG401 HSE Books 2013 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/afag401.htm

Mobile elevating work platforms (MEWPs) for tree work Leaflet AFAG403 HSE Books 2013 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/afag403.htm

HSE Treework webpages: www.hse.gov.uk/treework/index.htm

A guide to good climbing practice Arboricultural Association 2009 www.trees.org.uk

First aid at work: Your questions answered Leaflet INDG214(rev1) HSE Books 2009 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg214.htm

A guide to the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 L73 (Fourth edition) HSE Books 2012 ISBN 978 0 7176 6459 7 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l73.htm

Further information

For information about health and safety, or to report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance, visit www.hse.gov.uk. You can view HSE guidance online and order priced publications from the website. HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops.

This guidance is issued by the Health and Safety Executive. Following the guidance is not compulsory, unless specifically stated, and you are free to take other action. But if you do follow the guidance you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law. Health and safety inspectors seek to secure compliance with the law and may refer to this guidance.

This document is available at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/afag402.htm.